

POLICY ON PARTNERSHIPS IN THE PROVISION OF
ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

SECTION 1. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND.

.01 The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) "Policy on Partnerships in the Provision of Environmental Information" strengthens the partnership among government, academia, and the private sector which provides the Nation with high quality environmental information.

.02 The Nation's environmental information enterprise is conducted by many parties. For convenience, these parties are typically grouped into three sectors - government, private sector entities, and the academic and research community - although the enterprise as a whole also includes non-governmental organizations, private citizens, and others. This three-sector Environmental Information Enterprise has led to an extensive and flourishing set of services that are of great benefit to the public and the economy. Activities of NOAA, other government agencies, the private sector, and the academic/research community include, but are not limited to:

- a. NOAA's mission is to provide information to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, and conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet the Nation's economic, social, and environmental needs. To carry out this mission, it conducts research, produces various assessments and information products, and develops and maintains an infrastructure of observation, communications, and prediction systems that support the entire enterprise. NOAA also has specific obligations to provide information services to other government agencies.
- b. Other government agencies at all levels - federal (civilian and military), regional, state, local, and tribal - carry out activities that support the enterprise.
- c. The private sector includes weather companies, practitioners working for private companies or as consultants, broadcasters, risk managers, and others. The private sector uses NOAA information and also develops and maintains an infrastructure of observation, communication, and prediction systems to create products and services tailored to the needs of their company or clients. A critical private sector role is working with NOAA to communicate forecasts and warnings that may affect public safety.
- d. Academia educates future generations of participants in the enterprise, advances the science, and develops new technologies and services. These activities contribute to advances in the public and private sectors, and spin off new private sector entities.

.03 NOAA has a responsibility to foster the growth of this complex and diverse enterprise as a whole to serve the public interest and the Nation's economy. The Nation benefits from government information disseminated both by federal agencies and by diverse nonfederal parties, including commercial and not-for-profit entities. This policy commits NOAA to give due consideration to these abilities, and to consider the effects of its decisions on the activities of these entities in accordance with applicable law and government-wide policy. NOAA will not haphazardly institute significant changes in existing information dissemination activities, or introduce new services, without first carefully considering the full range of views and capabilities of all parties as well as the public's interest in the environmental information enterprise.

SECTION 2. SCOPE.

.01 This policy only applies to the provision of environmental information services by NOAA. It sets forth basic principles NOAA will apply in making decisions regarding these information services for the purpose of advancing the Nation's environmental information enterprise. It does not apply to NOAA acquisition or use of information. Other NOAA policies apply to NOAA's acquisition and use of information in carrying out its mission responsibilities, and to publication of reports, journal articles, and the like.

.02 And in particular, this policy does not apply to NOAA's acquisition, use, or provision of information in connection with performing its regulatory responsibilities carried out under applicable law, including the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, and the Land Remote Sensing Policy Act.

SECTION 3. POLICY.

.01 NOAA will adhere to the policies contained in the Paperwork Reduction Act, the Government Paperwork Elimination Act, OMB Circular No. A-130, "Management of Federal Information Resources," and other relevant laws. These policies are based on the premise that government information is a valuable national resource, and the benefits to society are maximized when government information is available in a timely and equitable manner to all.

.02 In furtherance of these policies, NOAA will carry out activities that contribute to its mission, including conducting research; providing environmental assessments; collecting and archiving data; ensuring their quality; issuing forecasts, warnings, and advisories; and providing open and unrestricted access to publicly-funded observations, analyses, model results, forecasts, and related information products in a timely manner and at the lowest possible cost to users.

.03 To advance the environmental information enterprise, NOAA will provide information in forms accessible to the public as well as underlying data in forms convenient to additional processing, to the extent practicable and within resource constraints. NOAA will make its data and products available in internet-accessible, vendor-neutral form and will use other dissemination technologies, e.g. satellite broadcast, NOAA Weather Radio, and wireless, as

appropriate. Information will comply with recognized standards, formats, and metadata descriptions to ensure data from different observing platforms, databases, and models can be integrated and used by all interested parties.

.04 The nation benefits from government information disseminated both by Federal agencies and by diverse nonfederal parties, including commercial and not-for-profit entities. NOAA recognizes cooperation, not competition, with private sector and academic and research entities best serves the public interest and best meets the varied needs of specific individuals, organizations, and economic entities. NOAA will take advantage of existing capabilities and services of commercial and academic sectors to support efficient performance of NOAA's mission and avoid duplication and competition in areas not related to the NOAA mission. NOAA will give due consideration to these abilities and consider the effects of its decisions on the activities of these entities, in accordance with its responsibilities as an agency of the U.S. Government, to serve the public interest and advance the nation's environmental information enterprise as a whole.

.05 NOAA is committed to open consultation with all who are affected by NOAA's environmental information services and will use appropriate mechanisms to encourage the maximum practicable and timely input from and collaboration with interested persons and entities on decisions affecting the environmental information enterprise. These mechanisms include:

- a. Establishing orderly processes for seeking input and suggestions to create, modify, or discontinue products and services;
- b. Cooperating with, and as necessary establishing, open processes concerned with advancing the environmental information enterprise; and
- c. Seeking advice on matters of concern in accord with the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

.06 NOAA will promote the open and unrestricted exchange of environmental information worldwide, and seek to improve global opportunities for developing the enterprise.

.07 NOAA's participation in the environmental information enterprise will be founded on the following principles:

- a. Mission connection: NOAA's information services will support the NOAA mission. As a government agency, NOAA recognizes its core responsibility to protect life and property.
- b. Consultation: Unless public safety or national security concerns dictate otherwise, NOAA will provide interested persons and entities adequate notice and opportunity for input into decisions regarding the development, dissemination, and discontinuance of significant products and services.

c. Open information dissemination: NOAA recognizes that open and unrestricted dissemination of high quality publicly funded information, as appropriate and within resource constraints, is good policy and is the law.

d. Equity: NOAA will be equitable in dealings with various classes of entities and will not show favoritism toward any particular entity within a class. NOAA recognizes it has special responsibilities to some users (e.g., public safety officials) and different legal requirements for its interactions with entities of different types (e.g., other federal agencies). NOAA will not provide an information service to one entity unless it can also be provided to other similar entities.

e. Recognition of Roles of Others: When faced with requests for information services, NOAA will explain existing NOAA services, including their uses and limitations, and inform the requester that others in the environmental information enterprise may be able to meet the requester's needs.

SECTION 4. RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCEDURES.

.01 NOAA offices will establish and publish procedures to implement this policy. Responsible officials include the NOAA Assistant Administrators and Chief Information Officer.

.02 Persons who believe NOAA offices' information services are being provided in a manner contrary to this policy may bring the matter to the attention of the responsible officials (see above) who will ascertain the facts and advise the complainant of their conclusions.

.03 NOAA will establish discretionary administrative review processes that responsible officials may use, as appropriate, to assist in making decisions regarding the creation, modification, or termination of significant environmental information services.

.04 NOAA will review the effectiveness of this policy every five years beginning five years after the implementation date.

SECTION 5. REFERENCES.

The OCIO will maintain a list of applicable reference materials and access to their electronic editions on the OCIO website at <http://www.cio.noaa.gov/nao.html>. The following are some of the primary reference materials related to this Order:

.01 Paperwork Reduction Act.

.02 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular No. A-130, Management of Federal Information Resources.

.03 NOAA maintains a website describing the history of the development of this Policy: <http://www.weather.gov/partnershippolicy/>

SECTION 6. EFFECT ON OTHER ISSUANCES.

None.

/Signed/
Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere

Office of Primary Interest:
National Weather Service
Office of Strategic Planning and Policy